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DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
CAMP BENNING, GA.

COURSE
IN
# HISTORICAL RESEARCH
1920-1921

# BATTLE
OF
# BLADENSBURG

PRINTED AT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL PRESS
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# BATTLE OF BLADENSBURG

*(Narrative by Lt. Col. R. I. Rees, Inf.)*

The Allied Powers entered Paris, March 31, 1814.

Napoleon abdicated the throne of France, April 4th. and the treaty of peace was signed April 11th. Peace in Europe immediately released the British military and naval forces from that sphere of operations and rendered them available for service elsewhere. War with the United States still continued, and pessimistic letters from our peace commissioneers in London indicated a reluctance on the part of Great Britain to consider terms of peace, but rather to prosecute the war with greater vigor, and events proved this to be true.

The war in Europe was hardly at an end when the British government made arrangements to send four brigades from Wellington's army to America; three of them to Canada, and one as an expeditionary force against coasts of the United States under command of Maj. Gen. Robert Ross. The mission of this force, according to the chancellor of the exchequer (in a speech after the event in the House of Commons, November 14, 1814.) was "to retaliate upon the Americans for the outrages which they had committed upon the frontiers."

The command of General Ross sailed from the mouth of the river Garonne in France, June, 2, 1814, escorted by "a squadron of eleven ships of war with several store ships and transports," and reached Bermuda, July 24th. The expedition was here reinforced by the 21st Regiment and sailed for the American coast August 3rd, sighting land August 14th and coming to anchor off the mouth of the Potomac on the 17th. 1

On this date General Ross issued a division order, organizing his command: 1st Brigade- 4th, or King's Own and 44th Regiments, Colonel Brooke, Commanding; 2nd Brigade, 21st Royal Scotts Fusiliers, 2nd Battalion Royal Marines and Detachment Marines under Captain Robbins, Colonel Patterson commanding; and the Light Brigade—85th Regiment, 4th, 21st 44th Light Infantry Companies. One company of Marines,, the Colonial Marines, and a detachment of artillery 2 3-pounders, one six, Colonel Thornton commanding. 2

In strength this command did not exceed 4500 men. 3

In arriving at a decision as to his future operations, Ross had the invaluable counsel and advice of Rear-Admiral Sir George Cockburn, who with his naval force had been operating for months previously along the coast of Maryland and Virginia. There is no doubt that the feasibility

1. Gleig, 42, 69, 89.
2. Spectator 22.
3. Gleig 95.

of an attack on Washington was discussed at this time, but a decision upon that point was permitted to rest upon the course of events. 4

The American flotilla under command of Commodore Joshua Barney had given considerable annoyance, and at times had shown stout resistance to the operations of the British Navy in the Chesapeake and the rivers flowing into it. This flotilla had now withdrawn up the Patuxent. It was therefore determined to make the destruction of this flotilla the primary mission, Ross's command to cooperate by land with Cockburn's advance up the river. With this end in view the expedition proceeded up the Patuxent to the head of navigation for large ships, abreast Benedict, reaching that place August 19th, and effecting a landing on the 20th. Admiral Cochrane sent out two smaller naval expeditions, one under Captain Gordon up the Potomac to bombard Fort Washington, the other, under Captain Sir Peter Parker, up the Chesapeake above Baltimore, to divert the attention of the enemy in that quarter. 5

Although British Naval depredations along the coast of Maryland and Virginia began in February, 1813, little was done by the National Government to resist these operations, the only effective force used for this purpose being Barney's flotilla. Dependence was placed almost entirely upon the local militia called out by the local authorities or by the states concerned. 6

The first definite information of the stupendous change in conditions in Europe brought about by the downfall of Napoleon, and its possible invigorating effect upon the British campaign against the United States reached Washington May 9, 1814, and was constantly being confirmed in later dispatches. 7

The government, and particularly the War Department, treated the threatening aspect of affairs with great apathy, and it was not until authoritative dispatches were received by the President on June 26th from the peace commissioners (Gallatin and Bayard) in Europe that the government was stirred to action. On July 1st President Madison called a meeting of the cabinet to consider measures of defense. As an outcome of this meeting, on July 2d the 10th Military District was created, consisting of the State of Maryland, the District of Columbia, and that part of Virginia lying between the Rappahannock and Potomac rivers, and Brigadier General William H. Winder of the United States Army was assigned to command. July 4th the President invited "the executives of certain States to organize and hold in readiness for immediate service, a corps of ninety-three thousand five hundred men," the quota of Maryland being 6000, Virginia 12,000, Pennsylvania 14,000. 8

Upon receipt of his order General Winder immediately took active command, and if his activities were, perhaps in part, wrongly directed,

4. Cochran's report, Palmer IV, 137.
Cockburn to Cochrane, 17 Jul. 11, M. SS. L. C.

5. Reports of Ross, Cochrane, Cockburn, Brennan, 137, Gleig 88-96.

6. Nat. Int. Mar. 17, 1811; Niles Register VI, 45.
Palmer II, P. 86. James VI, 224.

7. Nat. Int. May 9, 1814. Ibid May 18, June 30, July 1, 1814.

8. State Papers, Military Affairs I, 549.

they were no less ardent and strenuous. In his letter of July 9th to General Armstrong, Secretary of War, he makes a good estimate of the situation, particularly inviting the attention of the Secretary to the impossibility of assembling in time a militia not already called out and organized, should the enemy suddenly advance against Annapolis, Baltimore, or Washington, and recommending that a force of four thousand be immediately placed at his disposal. Armstrong did not reply to this letter. 9

The Secretary of War July 12th authorized General Winder, in case of actual or menaced invasion of the 10th District, to call "for a part, or for the whole of the quota (6000) assigned to the state of Maryland, which shall have been organized and equipped under the aforesaid requisition. In performing this duty, you will be careful to avoid unnecessary calls and to proportion the call to the exigency." Later under date of the 18th Winder was authorized to draw under the same conditions from the quota of Virginia 2000 men, and from that of Pennsylvania 5000. The whole of the militia of the District of Columbia, amounting to about 2000, was also placed subject to his orders. 10

Here was a paper strength of 15,000 militia, but subject to call only in case of actual or menaced invasion.

It is not within the limits of this paper to consider, the mass of correspondence between General Winder and the Secretary of War, the governors of the States of Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania and the several commanders of militia, or the confusion, obstacles and vexatious delays which attended upon his endeavor to organize a dependable force for the defense of his district. Suffice it to state that despite his most strenuous efforts, he was able to march to the field of Bladensburg not one militiaman from Pennsylvania, not one from Virginia, only one-third of the quota from Maryland, not the full quota even from the District of Columbia, 11

On the 17th of August, the day the British appeared off the mouth of the Potomac, General Winder had under his direct command a detachment of the 36th and 38th Regular Infantry, numbering 330 men, under command of Lieutenant Colonel Scott, a militia force of 250 men under Major Kramer at Bladensburg and the artillery garrisons at Forts Washington, McHenry, Severn and Madison, numbering in total 262. 12

It was therefore now necessary, the condition of actual invasion existing, to mobilize and concentrate the militia; and immediately upon receipt of the information on the 18th of the appearance of a greatly reinforced enemy, in the Chesapeake, orders were expressed to the governors and the several commanders of militia. 13

The resulting movements were:

General T. E. Stansbury's Brigade, numbering 1353, composed of

9. State Papers, Military Affairs, I, 543.

10. Published in Ingraham p. 12.
State Papers. Mil. Affairs, 549.

11. State Papers. Mil. Affairs I. 524 et seq.

12. State Papers. Mil. I. 554.

13. Winder's Court. M. S. S. J. A. G. O.

the 1st Regiment under Lt. Colonel Ragan, and the 2d Regiment, under Lt. Colonel Shutz, left Baltimore August 20th and reached Bladensburg on the evening of the 22d. 14

Colonel Joseph Sterrett's 5th Regiment, numbering 500, to which were attached Major William Pinkney's Rifle Battalion, 150; and two companies of artillery under Captains Myer and Magruder, with six six-pounders and 150 men, marched from Baltimore August 21st and arrived at Bladensburg about sunset on the 23d. 15

Colonel Wm. D. Beall's Annapolis Regiment (Col. Hood attached) 800 strong, reached Bladensburg on the 24th and marched through the village not half an hour before the arrival of the British. 16

The several detachments of militia or volunteer cavalry, Lieut. Col. Tilghman, Senior, amounted to about 260 troopers. Two troops of U. S. Light Dragoons, 125 men, under Lieut. Col. J. Lavall, just organized of recruits mounted on horses, most of which were purchased two weeks before, reported at Washington August 20th. 17

The 1st Columbian Brigade, Brig. General W. Smith, commanding, composed of two regiments under Cols. Magruder and Brent; two companies artillery, twelve six-pounders, and two companies riflemen, armed with muskets, under Major Peter, totalling 1,070 men, was ordered out on the night of the 18th, assembled on the 19th, and after great difficulty in obtaining the necessary equipment, succeeded in taking up the march over the Eastern Branch bridge late in the afternoon of the 20th. 18

These, with a small battalion of 150 men under Major Waring of Md. Militia, constituted the whole force under General Winder's command at the battle of Bladensburg. Commodore Barney, with 500 flotilla men and 103 marines under Captain Miller cooperated with him on that field. Reports in the archives of the War Department give the total American forces at Bladensburg, 5401.

General Young's 2d Columbian Brigade 450 strong was sent on Aug. 20th to the defense of Fort Washington, and Colonel Minor's Virginia regiment was delayed in Washington and did not reach Bladensburg. 19

The Secretary of State, Colonel Monroe volunteered on the 18th to make a reconnaissance of the enemy, and with a small detachment of District Cavalry started out on the next morning. He furnished General Winder with almost the only dependable information he received of the enemy's march north to Nottingham. He estimated the enemy's strength at five to seven thousand. 20

14. Stansbury's Report. State Papers. Mil. Affairs I. 560.

15. Sterrett's & Pinkney's Reports.
State Papers, Mil. Affairs. I. 568, 571.

16. Beall's and Pinkney's Reports. State Papers. Mil. Affairs I. 571.

17. Lavall's & Caldwell's Report. State Papers. Mil. Affairs I. 569, 575.

18. Smith's Report. State Papers.
Mil. Affairs I. 563.

19. Young's and Minor's Report.
State Papers I., 566, 568.

20. Monroe's report. Winder's Narrative. State Papers. Mil. Affairs I, 506, 555.

On the 20th, Winder sent Col. Tilghman with his squadron of cavalry via Woodyard with orders to "harrass, obstruct and impede" the march of the enemy. 21

On Monday morning, the 22d, there were assembled at Woodyard General Smith's Brigade, Scott's Regulars, Lavall's Cavalry, and Kramer's Battalion, and General Winder early sent out the detachment of the Regular infantry and Major Peter's command, with Lavall's cavalry preceding to make a reconnaissance in force toward Nottingham where the British were known to have camped the night before. Winder accompanied the cavalry, and having proceeded about four miles he perceived the British marching by the direct road toward Upper Marlborough. Without attempting to engage the enemy he ordered the withdrawal of the whole command to Battalion Old Fields, a point about eight miles from Upper Marlborough and the same distance from Washington. About noon of this day, Commodore Barney being convinced that his flotilla was doomed to capture destroyed it and with his seamen joined General Winder's command at Battalion Old Fields. Captain Miller with his marines had also joined. The next day, the 23d, a similar manoeuver was repeated, the advance of a detachment toward the enemy in the direction of Upper Marlborough, a meeting, a withdrawal without an engagement to Battalion Old Fields with the enemy halted only three miles distant; then in the evening a most extraordinary decision on the part of General Winder, even at variance with his own estimate of the situation, caused him to withdraw his whole force into the City of Washington across the Eastern Branch Bridge. Thus were the British permitted an uninterrupted and an almost totally unharrassed march of forty-five miles into the enemy's country. 22

General Winder found himself the next morning out of touch with the enemy, and the victim of many contradictory rumors as to his movements. However, about ten o'clock, definite intelligence was received that the British were marching on Bladensburg. As soon as he had issued the necessary orders placing his command in march, he preceded it in haste to Bladensburg. In the meantime General Stansbury, in command at Bladensburg, having received information of Winder's retreat across the Eastern Branch, and also that the British were advancing on Bladensburg, determined to march toward Washington to form a junction with General Winder. After having proceeded about a mile and a half in that direction he was met by his Adjutant, Major Woodyear, returning from General Winder with positive orders to give the enemy battle at Bladensburg, and that he would be reinforced. General Stansbury at once counter-marched his command, proceeded toward Bladensburg, and selected the ground along the right bank of the Eastern Branch just west of Bladensburg for defense. 23.

The battlefield of Bladensburg is a terrain gradually rising to the west from the Eastern Branch terminating one mile distant in a low line

21. Winder's Court. M. S. S., J. A. G. O.
22. Winder's Narrative. Smith's Report. Catlett's Report.
23. Stansbury, Sterrett and Pinkney.
State Papers, I, 361-371.

of hills perpendicular to the Washington turnpike. The river bank is low and marshy back about 300 yards from the river where there is a low terrace. The old Washington road forms a junction with the pike near the bridge and leads in a westerly direction. About 1100 yards from the bridge is a broad, deep ravine (the old dueling ground) crossing the pike perpendicularly. From the bridge in this ravine to the line of hills the distance is 650 yards. The ground west of the ravine and north of the pike is considerably cut up by gullies; to the south it is fairly level.

In making his dispositions, assisted by the Secretary of State who had joined him, General Stansbury placed Myer and Magruder's artillery in a trench prepared the day before by Colonel Decius Wadsworth, C. E., on the crest of the low terrace, to the north of the pike. Major Pinkney's battalion supported the artillery, two companies on the right near the pike, and one on the left. He concealed his men behind fences and in the underbrush. Captain Doughty's company of the Fifth Regiment also supported the artillery on the right.

About 250 yards in rear, with an orchard intervening, were disposed Colonel Ragan with his right on the road, Colonel Schutz in the center and Colonel Sterrett on the left somewhat farther advanced and nearer the artillery. General Stansbury states that his entire line was later moved back 250 yards, by whose authority he does not know, presumably Colonel Monroe's. 24.

General Winder arrived on the field and approved these dispositions. He brought with him Captain Burch's Battery, two guns of which were placed on the pike on Ragan's right and three on the old road to Sterrett's left. Lavall's cavalry was in rear to the left of Sterrett.

When the column from Washington arrived, General Smith placed them in position along the line of hills already mentioned. Commodore Barney with his two 18 pounders occupied the center on the pike, the sailors armed as infantry on his right, the line being farther extended by Captain Miller's marines a little more advanced. Colonel Beall with his Annapolis militia was already in a position on a hill about 250 yards from the road on Barney's right. The left was extended by Colonel Magruder's regiment, Major Peter's battery and riflemen, with Colonel Scott's Regulars on the extreme left. This was the final disposition after some shifting. Major Kramer's battalion was advanced in front of the sailors to the edge of the ravine. 25

On the morning of the 23d at Upper Marlborough following the destruction of Barney's flotilla, General Ross and Rear Admiral Cockburn held a conference and it was quickly decided that an attempt should be made to capture the city of Washington. Accordingly Ross took up the march on the afternoon of the same day. On the 24th the troops resumed the march and reached Bladensburg. On the opposite side of the Eastern Branch the enemy was discovered and from Lowndes Hill Ross reconnoitered his position. Disposition for attack having been

24. Stansbury, Pinkney, Monroe.
State Papers, I, 361-371.

25. W. Smith, Colonel Beall.
State Papers, Military Affairs, I., 663.

made, it was commenced with much impetuosity by the Light Brigade, under Colonel Thornton. The first line was soon carried, the enemy retiring to higher ground. The Light Brigade being unable to carry the second line, it was reinforced by the 1st Brigade, under Colonel Brooke, the 44th attacking the enemy's left, the 4th pressing his right the whole line soon gave way, and the Americans fled. This is the British account. 26

On the American side, the artillery with Pinkney's battalion in support, received the brunt of the first assault. The British were forced off the streets of Bladensburg to cover of the buildings, and were considerably delayed in crossing the river. Major Pinkney was soon forced back, withdrew to the left and formed again on Colonel Sterrett's left. The regiment of Colonels Ragan and Schutz were quickly driven back, the untrained militia being unable to withstand the discharge of the Congreve rockets used by the British. Colonel Sterrett maintained his position until his right flank, now exposed, was completely turned and his left threatened, and only withdrew when ordered to do so by General Winder. Lavall's regular cavalry retreated in the melee without being of any service. This whole force was completely demoralized, and their retreat became a rout. Fortunately their line of retreat led them north and clear of the second line.

The British attack developed entirely on the right of this line, south of the road. Major Kramer's battalion on the crest of the ravine was soon forced to withdraw, but every attempt the enemy made to advance from the ravine against Barney and Miller's front was repulsed with heavy loss. Major Peter with his artillery on the left rendered considerable assistance with his cross fire in the early stages of this action. Being reenforced and working around to their left the British assaulted the hill occupied by the Annapolis troops under Colonel Beall, who, after firing three or four rounds, retreated in disorder. Barney's right was now flanked by the enemy. This being observed by General Winder, he ordered a general retreat which was executed in good order by the troops that remained. General Smith's District Militia and Colonel Scott's Regular Detachment were not engaged. Commodore Barney was severely wounded and was taken prisoner. What remained of General Winder's command retreated through the city to the heights of Georgetown, and later to Montgomery Courthouse. 27

The British did not pursue. After a halt upon the battlefield, the march was resumed and the command reached the outskirts of Washington about 8:00 p. m. Ross and Cockburn entered the city with about 200 men and the work of destruction began. The Capitol, the White House, and the public offices, Treasury, State, War and Navy and Public Library were burned; a rope walk and long bridge over the Potomac destroyed; the printing establishment of the National Intelligence wrecked; the destruction of the Navy Yard was made complete. The total public loss

26. Ross' and Cockburn's reports.
Palmer IV, 142, Gleig, 122.

27. Ross's report..
Palmer IV, 148, Military Affairs I.

was $969,171.04. The British hastily retreated from Washington on the night of the 25th and reached Benedict on the 29th. 28

The British loss at the battle of Bladensburg was 64 officers and men killed, and 185 officers and men wounded, the total casualties 249, a casualty percentage of 5½. The heaviest losses were in the 85th and the 4th, both of which regiments were in Barney's front. The 85th also made the first advance.

The American losses were, according to reports in the archives of the War Department, 25 officers and men killed, and 41 officers and men wounded, total 66, giving a casualty percentage of 1.2. The heaviest losses were sustained by Captain Miller's detachment of Marines, Colonel Sterrett's Regiment and Commodore Barney's seamen. Captain Miller lost 21 per cent of his force.

In frontages, our first line was occupied by about 5 men per yard and the second line by 3 men per yard; seemingly sufficient for defense against an inferior force.

The cause for this disaster and the failure of the American arms are not far to seek.

Many in authority at Washington did not think it possible that the British would have the temerity to advance so far inland as to attack the capitol, when Annapolis and Baltimore were so much more accessible. Chief among these was the Secretary of War himself, which may account in part for the half hearted support he gave to General Winder.

At any rate, there was a notable lack of organization and training in the force hurriedly assembled on the field of Bladensburg. It was little more than a mob. General Winder felt keenly the necessity of attaining these two great factors for military success, but was again met with the opinion of General Armstrong "that the most advantageous mode of using militia was upon the spur of the occasion, and to bring them to fight as soon as called."

The dilatory policy of the government caused to exist a great shortage of transportation, munitions, rations and supplies of every kind, resulting in delay in assembling and in unnecessary hardship and suffering for the troops.

In leadership General Winder, 39 years of age, was a lawyer in Baltimore until he was appointed a Lieutenant Colonel in the Regular Army in July, 1812. He was appointed Brigadier General in March, 1813, was captured by the British on the northern frontier June 1, 1813, and remained a prisoner on parole until he took command of the 10th military district. He could not hope to have the military attainments of his opponent, General Ross, 48 years of age, 25 years a British officer and accustomed to large commands.

A discussion or comparison of the quality of troops is needless; Wellington's veterans against raw militia.

The dispositions at Bladensburg were taken up hurriedly and without coordination. The lines were formed not within supporting distance, the effective range of the musket at that time being not more than 200

28. Ross' report.
Palmer IV, 148, Military Affairs I.

yards. This permitted the enemy to defeat each line in detail. The successive line formation is not for untrained troops in the open.

The timid tactical policy of General Winder was doomed to failure. He should have prepared defenses for the near approaches to the city. He should have moved with all his available force to gain quick contact with the enemy, being reinforced as other troops assembled. Had he maintained close contact with the enemy, fought delaying actions, determined, using his own words to Col. Tilghman to "obstruct, harass, impede him in every way your resource and ingenuity can suggest," he might have achieved success.

If after all his efforts he had still been forced to meet the enemy on the field of Bladensburg and suffer defeat, he should not have fled through the streets of Washington to the heights of Georgetown, but should have contested every foot of ground from that field to the very doors of the capitol.

## STATEMENT OF GENERAL WINDER TO INVESTIGATION IN THE INVASION AND CAPTURE OF WASHINGTON.

As soon as I learned the enemy were moving toward Bladensburg I ordered General Smith, with the whole of the troops, to move immediately to that point.

* * * * *

I arrived at the bridge at Bladensburg about twelve o'clock, where I found Lieutenant-Colonel Beall had that moment passed with his command, having just arrived from Annapolis. I had passed the line of Stansbury's brigade, formed in the field upon the left of the road, at about a quarter of a mile in the rear of the bridge; and on the road, a short distance in the rear of Stansbury's line, I met several gentlemen, and among the others, I think, Mr. Francis Key, of Georgetown, who informed me that he had thought that the troops coming from the city could be most advantageously posted on the rignt and left of the near that point. General Smith being present, Mr. Key undertook, I believe, being sent for that purpose, to show the positions proposed. I left General Smith to make a disposition of these troops, and proceeded to the bridge, where I found Lieutenant-Colonel Beall, as before stated. I inquired whether he had any directions as to his position; he replied he had been shown a high hill upon the right of the road, ranging with the proposed second line. It being a commanding position, and necessary to be occupied by some corps, I directed him to proceed agreeably to the instructions he had received. I then rode up to a battery which had been thrown up to command the street which entered Bladensburg from the side of the enemy and the bridge, where I found the Baltimore artillery posted, with the Baltimore riflemen to support them. Upon inquiry, I learned that General Stansbury was on a rising ground upon the left of his line. I rode immediately thither, and found him and Colonel Monroe together. The latter gentleman informed me that he had been aiding General Stansbury to post his command, and wished me to proceed to

examine it with them, to see how far I approved of it. We were just proceeding with this view, when some person rode up and stated that the news had just been received of a signal victory obtained by General Izard over the enemy, in which one thousand of the enemy were slain, and many prisoners taken. I ordered the news to be immediately communicated to the troops, for the purpose of giving additional impulse to their spirit and courage. The column of the enemy at this moment appeared in sight, moving up the Eastern branch parallel to our position. From the left, where I was, I perceived that if the position of the advanced artillery were forced, two or three pieces upon the left of Stansbury would be necessary to scour an orchard which lay between his line and his artillery, and for another rifle company to increase the support of this artillery.

These were promptly sent forward by General Smith, and posted as hastily as possible, and it was barely accomplished before I was obliged to give orders to the advanced artillery to open upon the enemy, who was descending the street toward the bridge. All farther examination or movement was now impossible, and the position where I then was, immediately in the rear of the left of Stansbury's line, being the most advanced position from which I could have any commanding view, I remained there. The fire of our advanced artillery occasioned the enemy, who were advancing, and who were light troops, to leave the street, and they crept down under the cover of houses and trees, in loose order, so as not to expose them to risk from the shot; it was therefore only occasionally that an object presented at which the artillery could fire.

In this sort of suspension, the enemy began to throw his rockets, and his light troops began to accumulate down in the lower parts of the town and near the bridge, but principally covered from view by the houses. Their light troops, however, soon began to issue out and press across the creek, which was everywhere fordable, and in most places lined with bushes or trees, which were sufficient, however, to conceal the movements of light troops, who act, in the manner of theirs, singly. The advanced riflemen now began to fire, and continued it for half a dozen rounds, when I observed them to run back to the skirts of the orchard on the left, where they became visible, the boughs of the orchard trees concealing their original position, as also that of the artillery from view. A retreat of twenty or thirty yards from their original position toward the left brought them in view on the edge of the orchard. They halted here, and seemed for a moment returning to their position, but in a few minutes entirely broke, and retired to the left of Stansbury's line. I immediately ordered the 5th Baltimore regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Sterrett, being the left of Stansbury's line, to advance and sustain the artillery. They promptly commenced this movement; but the rockets, which had for the first three or four passed very high above the heads of the line, now received a more horizontal direction, and passed very close above the heads of Shutz's and Ragan's regiments, composing the centre and left of Stansbury's line. A universal flight of these regiments was the consequence. This leaving the right of the 5th wholly unsupported I ordered it to halt, rode swiftly across the field toward those who had so shamefully fled, and exerted my voice to the utmost to arrest

them. They halted,began to collect and seemed to be returning to their places. An ill-founded reliance that their officers would succeed in rallying them when I had thus succeeded in stopping the greatest part of them, induced me immediately to return to the 5th, the situation of which was likely to became very critical, and that position gave me the best command of view. To my astonishment and mortification, however, when I had regained my position, I found the whole of these regiments (except thirty or forty of Ragan's rallied by himself, and as many, perhaps, of Shutz's, rallied, I learn, by Captain Shower and Captain ———, whose name I do not recollect) were flying in the utmost precipitation and disorder.

The advance artillery had immediately followed the riflemen, and retired by the left of the 5th. I directed them to take post on a rising ground which I pointed out in the rear. The 5th, and the artillery on its left, still remained, and I hoped that their fire, notwithstanding the obstruction of the boughs of the orchard, which, being below, covered the enemy, would have been enabled to scour this approach and prevent his advance. The enemy's light troops, by single men, showed themselves on the lower edge of the left of the orchard, and received the fire of this artillery and the 5th, which made them draw back. The cover to them was, however, so complete that they were enabled to advance singly and take positions from which their fire annoyed the 5th considerably, without either that regiment or the artillery being able to return the fire with any probability of effect. In this situation I had actually given an order to the 5th and the artillery to retire up to the hill, toward a wood more to the left and a little in the rear, for the purpose of drawing them farther from the orchard, and out of reach of the enemy's fire while he was sheltered by the orchard. As aversion, however, to retire before the necessity became stronger, and the hope that the enemy would issue in a body from the left of the orchard and enable us to act upon him on terms of equality, and the fear that a movement of retreat might in raw troops produce some confusion and lose us this chance, induced me instantly to countermand the order, and direct the artillery to fire into a wooden barn on the lower end of the orchard, behind which I supposed the enemy might be sheltered in considerable numbers. The fire of the enemy now began, however, to annoy the 5th still more in wounding several of them, and a strong column of the enemy having passed up the road as high as the right of the 5th, and beginning to deploy into the field to take them in flank, I directed the artillery to retire to the hill to which I had directed the Baltimore artillery to proceed and halt, and ordered the 8th regiment also to retire. This corps, which had heretofore acted so firmly, evinced the usual incapacity of raw troops to make orderly movements in the face of the enemy, and their retreat in a very few moments became a flight of absolute and total disorder.

The direct line of retreat to the whole of this first line being to the hill on which I had directed the artillery to halt, and immediately in connection with the positions of General Smith's corps, which were not arrayed in line, but posted on advantageous positions in connection with and supporting each other, according as the nature of the ground admitted and required, I had not for a moment, dispersed and disordered as as the whole of Stansbury's command, supposed that their retreat would

.ave taken a different direction. But it soon became apparent that the hole mass were throwing themselves off to the right on the retreat toward Montgomery Court House, and flying wide of this point; the whole of the cavalry, probably from the pressure of the infantry that .ay, were also thrown wide of the line of retreat toward the right.

After making every effort to turn the current more toward General Smith's command the city in vain, and finding that it was impossible to collect any force to support the artillery, which I had directed to halt, and finding also that the enemy's light troops were extending themselves in that direction, and pressing the pursuit, I directed the artillery to continue their retreat on the road they then were toward the Capitol, it being impossible for them to get across to the turnpike road or unite with General Smith's brigade.

The hope of again forming the first line at this point, and there renewing the retreat, or, at all events, of being able to rally them between the Capitol and that point and renewing the contest, induced me, at the moment I directed the 5th regiment to retreat, to request Mr. Riggs, of Georgetown, to proceed to the President and inform him that we had been driven back, but that it was my hope and intention to form and renew the contest between that place and the Capitol.

As soon as I found it vain longer to endeavor to turn the tide of retreat toward the left, I turned toward the positions occupied by Lieutenant-Colonel Beall, Commodore Barney, and General Smith. By this time the enemy had advanced up the road, had driven back Lieutenant-Colonel Kramer's command, posted on the right of the road, and in advance of Commodore Barney, after having well maintained his position and much hurt the enemy, and also continued to fire during his retreat. He had come under the destructive fire of Commodore Barney, which had turned him up the hill toward Lieutenant-Colonel Beall, whose detachment gave one or two ineffective fires and fled. Their position was known to me, was very conspicuous, and the extreme right. The enemy, therefore, had gained this commanding position, and was passing our right flank; his force pursuing on the left had also advanced to a line with our left, and there was nothing there to oppose him. To preserve Smith's command from being pressed in front by fresh troops of the enemy, who were coming on at the same time, while they were under the certainty of being assailed on both flanks and the rear by the enemy, who respectively gained them, in which circumstances their destruction or surrender would have been inevitable, I sent (my horse being unable to move with the rapidity I wished) to General Smith to retreat. I am not acquainted with the relative position of the different corps composing his command, and cannot, therefore, determine who of them engaged the enemy, nor could I see how they acted; but when I arrived in succession at his different corps, which I did as soon as practicable, I do not recollect to have found any of them that were not in order, and retreating with as little confusion as could have been expected. When I reached the road I found Commodore Barney's men also retiring on the road, he having been overpowered by those who drove off Beall's regiment about the time I sent the order to retreat.

* * * *

I accordingly pursued this course, and halted at Tenleytown, two miles from Georgetown, on the Frederick road. Here was evinced one of the great defects of all undisciplined and unorganized troops; no effort could rouse officers and men to the exertion necessary to place themselves in such a state of comfort and security as is attainable even under very disadvantageous circumstances. Such of them as could be halted, instead of making those efforts, gave themselves up to the uncontrolled feelings which fatigue, exhaustion, and privation produced, and pursued their way, either toward home, or in search of refreshments and quarters. After waiting in this position until I supposed I collected all the force that could be gathered, I proceeded about five miles further on the river road, which leads a little wide to the left of Montgomery Court House, and in the morning gave orders for the whole to assemble at Montgomery Court House.

If I had had longer time, or to repeat the action of Bladensburg, I could correct several errors, which might materially have affected the issue of that battle. The advanced force ought to have been nearer to the creek, along the edge of the low ground, where they would have been skirted with bushes, and have avoided the inconvenience of the cover which the orchard afforded the enemy. The edge of the low grounds on the right of the road ought to have been lined with musketry, and a battery of cannon also planted in the field on the right of the road, directly fronting the bridge; and if Commodore Barney's heavy artillery, with his more expert artillerists, had occupied the position which the advanced artillerists did, and those posts been obstinately defended, the enemy would not have crossed the river at that point, but would have been obliged to have made a circuit around to his right, and have crossed above and at the upper end of the town: or, if the whole force had been posted at the position of the second line, with all the advantage which it afforded, and had acted with tolerable courage and firmness, the event might have been different; but no advantage of position is proof against groundless panic, and a total want of discipline, skill, and experience.

## REPORT OF GENERAL STANBURY.

I immediately ordered the troops to retrace their steps to Bladensburg, determined to maintain, if possible, the ground at all hazards.

On arriving in the orchard near the hill, I directed the artillery to post themselves behind a small breastwork of dirt that lately had been thrown up by Colonel Wadsworth. This battery commanded the pass into Bladensburg and the bridge southwesterly of the town. Our artillery consisted of six six-pounders; Major Pinkney's battalion of riflemen on their right, under cover of the town and bushes, also commanding the pass by the bridge; two companies from Lieutenant-Colonel Shutz's regiment, under the command of Captains Ducker and Gorsuch, acting as riflemen, although principally armed with muskets, on the left of the artillery, near and protected by the barn, intended to defend the road leading by the mill on the left of the battery, into the field; Colonel Sterrett's regiment was halted in the orchard, on the right and in the

rear, and the regiments of Colonels Ragan and Shutz were also halted in the orchard, in the rear and on the left flank, near the creek. My intentions were that they should remain here to refresh themselves as long as possible, and, as soon as the enemy appeared, to form Colonel Sterrett's regiment (in whom I placed great confidence) on the right, their left resting on and supporting the right of Major Pinkney's riflemen, in view of the bridge and fronting the road, along which ran a fence, and act as occasion should require. Colonels Ragan's and Shutz's regiments were to be drawn up in echelon, their right resting on the left of Captains Ducker's and Gorsuch's rifle companies, in order to prevent the enemy from pressing and turning our left, hoping that General Winder would join me before the battle would commence, and occupy the ground in my rear as a second line. About 11 o'clock a. m. I was informed by a dragoon from Lieutenant-Colonel Beall that he was on the road from Annapolis to Bladensburg, with about eight hundred men, distant from me about five miles, and wished to know the distance and situation of the enemy. I directed the dragoon to return and inform him that I had that moment received information that the British, with their whole force, were approaching Bladensburg by the river road, and that they were only three and a half miles distant, and advised the colonel to file off to his right and cross above Bladensburg, to fall into an old road which I understood led to our left toward Washington, and take a position on the high grounds north and northwest of Bladensburg, which would completely protect my left by preventing the enemy from outflanking us that way, and force their main body across the bridge, in the face of my artillery and riflemen on the main road, and expose them to the fire of the 5th regiment under Colonel Sterrett, who would be protected by the fence.

This advice, it appeared, Colonel Beall only took in part, I presume from an anxious wish to place himself between the enemy and the city. He sent his baggage off to the right, and with his troops passed the bridge at Bladensburg about thirty minutes before the enemy appeared on Mr. Lowndes' hill, and took his station on the hill, as I was informed, near the brick-kiln where we halted in the morning, about one and a half miles in my rear, and on the left of the road leading to the city. About meridian the enemy could clearly be seen making toward us by the river road.

While I was giving some directions to the artillery, I found Lieutenant-Colonels Ragan's and Shutz's regiments had been moved from the place where I had stationed them, and marched out of the orchard up the hill and formed in order of battle about two hundred and fifty yards above the orchard, and upward of five hundred yards in the rear of the artillery and riflemen. Thus uncovered by the trees of the orchard, their situation and numbers were clearly seen by the enemy from Lowndes' Hill, and the flanks of the artillery and riflemen unprotected and laid liable to be turned, our main body being placed too far off to render them any aid. On riding up the hill to know who had ordered this movement, I was informed that General Winder was on the ground. At this time I met with Brigadier General Smith, of the District of Columbia, and some conversation took place between us respecting the order of battle and seniority; the particulars I do not recollect. I immediately rode to the mill, where I understood General Winder was, and found him recon-

noitering the position of the enemy. While in conversation with him, the 5th regiment was taken out of the orchard, marched up the hill, and stationed on the left of Colonel Shutz's regiment, that of Colonel Ragan being on the right, its right resting on the main road; but, as I before observed, the whole at so great a distance from the artillery and riflemen that they had to contend with the whole British force, and so much exposed that it has been a cause of astonishment they preserved their ground so long and ultimately succeeded in retreating. Whose plan this was I know not; it was not mine, nor did it meet with my approbation; but, finding a superior officer on the ground, I concluded he had ordered it, consequently did not interfere. General Winder asked me where I meant to take my station. I answered, about the centre of my brigade. He said he would take his on the left of the 5th regiment. General Winder was extremely active on giving directions and encouraging the men. I took my station in the centre of Colonels Ragan's and Shutz's regiments, but occasionally rode along the line, encouraging the men and giving orders to the officers. Major Woodyear I directed to keep with the left of Colonel Shutz's regiment, to cheer up the men and assist the officers. Major Randall rode with me. Soon after, the action commenced by the artillery and riflemen at the battery. The fire of the artillery had great effect, and evidently produced confusion in the ranks of the enemy, who took shelter behind a warehouse, from whence they fired rockets; but a few well-directed shots drove them from this position. A flanking party, concealed by the banks and bushes, pushed up the river to turn our left, while a strong force attempted the bridge; but the incessant and well-directed fire from our artillery and riflemen at the battery occasioned evident confusion among their ranks, so much so that their officers could be seen actively engaged preventing their retreating, and pushing them on to the bridge, and here I think the enemy suffered considerably. At length they succeeded in passing the bridge in small parties at full speed, which formed after crossing. I had ordered forty horsemen with axes to cut away this bridge before the near approach of the enemy, and saw them with their axes. Why this order was not executed I never could learn. It is certain the enemy could have forded the stream above; but I considered it would, in some degree, impede their progress and give our artillery and riflemen more time and opportunity to act with effect against them.

The artillery, under the command of Captains Myer and Magruder, and the riflemen, the whole under the command of Major Pinkney, behaved in the most gallant manner (this gallant officer in the course of the action was severely wounded), but the superior force of the enemy, and the rapidity with which he moved, compelled them to retire; but one of the pieces was lost, and this was rendered harmless before it was abandoned.

The enemy took every advantage of the cover afforded them by the trees of the orchard, and their light troops from thence kept up a galling fire upon our line. On this party, when advanced nearer, the 5th regiment, under Colonel Sterrett, opened a steady and well-directed fire, which was followed by the fire from the right, and ultimately from our centre, when the firing on both sides became general. After a few rounds, the

troops on the right began to break. I rode along the line, and gave orders to the officers to cut down those who attempted to fly, and suffer no man to leave the lines. On arriving at the left of the centre regiment, I found Lieutenant-Colonel Schutz's men giving way, and that brave officer, with Major Kemp, aided by my aid-de-camp, Major Woodyear, exerting themselves in rallying and forming them again. Captain Gallaway's company and part of Captains Shower's and Randall's companies were rallied and formed again, and behaved gallantly. The rest of Colonels Shutz's and Ragan's regiments fled in disorder, notwithstanding the extraordinary exertions of their officers to prevent it. On the left I soon after discovered a part of the 5th regiment giving way, and that excellent officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Sterrett, with those under him, most actively engaged forming them again. Soon after the retreat became general, and all attempts to rally them, and make a second stand, were fruitless. With a body of United States cavalry, I endeavored to protect the rear and right of the retreating men, so as to prevent their falling into the enemy's possession.

The men under my command were worn down and nearly exhausted from long and forced marches, want of food, and watching. They had been, with very little intermission, under arms and marching from the time of their departure from Baltimore, with but little sleep, bad provisions, and but little opportunity to cook. They certainly were not in a condition to go into battle; but my orders were positive, and I was determined to obey them.

* * * *

On arriving at the city, with part of Colonel Lavall's United States Cavalry covering the retreat, and collecting the rear of our scattered troops, I found General Winder's command had passed through it toward Georgetown. I proceeded there, and then followed to a village a few miles beyond it, where I overtook him with troops collecting under his command, and some of those of my brigade. The army thence proceeded to Montgomery Court House on the 25th of August, where it was hourly re-enforced by those who fled from the field.

As there had been no place assigned by the commanding general previous to the action to which the men should retreat in case of a defeat, many of those under my immediate command had fled from the field toward Baltimore.

Reports from Georgetown and the city reached me that the arms of many of the enemy had fallen into the hands of the blacks, and it was apprehended that they would take advantage of the absence of the men to insult the females, and complete the work of destruction commenced by the enemy.

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## REPORT OF GENERAL SMITH

Here, at the Long Old Fields, pursuant to directions from General Winder, I assumed the command of the assembled forces, those of Commodore Barney excepted, consisting now of the following troops, viz.;

make, I apprised General Stansbury of my views as to the troops under my command, suggesting that, if his line should be forced and he could again form on my left, the nature of the ground there would be favorable for a renewal of the action, which might then become general. By this time we received advice that the enemy were near Bladensburg, and I left him to hasten the arrival of my troops. They moved rapidly on, notwithstanding the excessive heat of the day, covered with clouds of dust, and were promptly disposed of as follows: Lieutenant-Colonel Scott, with the 36th U. S. regiment, was posted in a field on the left of the road, his right resting upon it, and commanding the road descending into the ravine before mentioned, in the rear of General Stansbury's right, and the rest of his line commanding the ascent from the ravine. This position was about one hundred and fifty yards in the rear of the front line, but extending to the right. In the same field, about one hundred yards in the rear of the 36th regiment, Colonel Magruder was posted with a part of the 1st regiment of District Militia, his right also resting upon the road, the left advanced, presenting a front obliquely to the road, and situated to cover and cooperate with the 36th regiment; Major Peter, with his artillery, six six-pounders; Captain Davidson's light infantry, and Captain Stull's rifle corps, armed with muskets, all of the same regiment, were ordered to take possession of the abrupt acclivity before mentioned, terminating the ravine. This was deemed a desirable position, because it commanded completely the ravine and the road crossing it, and a considerable extent of the ground over which the front line would necessarily retire if forced back; but, after a short space of time, report was made to me that broken grounds interrupted the approach to it with artillery but a circuitous route that would consume much time, and that in case of retreat, the ground in the rear was such as might endanger the safety of the guns. It was mentioned, at the same time, that near to it was a commanding position for artillery, and easy of access from and to the road. I yielded with reluctance to the abandonment of the position first ordered, but time did not admit of hesitation. Meanwhile I had posted Lieutenant-Colonel Kramer, with his battalion of Maryland drafted militia, in the woods on the right of the road, and commanding the ravine which continued in that direction, with orders that, if forced, he should retire, by his right, through a body of woods in that direction, and rally and form with the troops stationed in the rear, on the extreme right. Upon examining the position taken by Major Peter's battery, it was found that the range of his guns was principally through that part of the field occupied by the 36th regiment. To remove one or the other became necessary, and the difficulty of the ground for moving artillery, and the exigency of the movement left no alternative. The 36th fell back about one hundred yards, losing, in some measure, the advantage of its elevated ground, and leaving the road. The position of the 1st regiment District militia, from this circumstance, was also necessarily changed. It fell back about the same distance, its right still resting on the road, and now formed nearly in line with the 36th. Of the 2d regiment, District militia, two pieces of artillery and one company of riflemen, armed with muskets, were, by directions of General Winder, sent on to the front; with these he flanked the

District volunteers and militia, 1070; Lieutenant-Colonel Scott's 36th United States regiment, 350; Lieutenant-Colonel Kramer's battalion of drafted militia, 240; and Major Waring's battalion of Prince George's militia, about 150; total, about 1800 men. An encampment was formed for the night, and such positions taken as were best calculated to resist a night attack; the cavalry being already stationed in advance on the different roads leading to Marlborough, with orders to keep patrolling parties constantly upon the enemy's quarters, and to advise of all his movements. The troops, being greatly fatigued, sought in sleep that repose they so much wanted. In this they were disappointed. An alarm gun aroused them about 2 o'clock in the morning of the 23d. They were quickly formed in the front of their encampment, and dispositions made to meet and repel the expected attack; but in a short time it was ascertained to be a false alarm, and the troops were dismissed, but with orders to hold themselves ready for their posts at a moment's warning.

At daylight, General Winder gave orders to have the tents struck and the baggage-wagons loaded, and that the whole should be ready to move in one hour. These orders were complied with with all possible expedition. Shortly after the troops were got under arms, and were joined by another small detachment of Prince George's militia, under the command of Major Maynard, about one hundred and fifty. The whole were held ready to move according to orders. About this time I received directions from General Winder to have formed an advance corps, constructed as the one of the preceding day, and be prepared to move as his subsequent orders should designate.

* * * *

On Wednesday morning, the 24th of August, at 11 a. m. I received orders from General Winder to detach one piece of artillery and one company of infantry to repair to the Eastern Branch Bridge, and there report to Colonel Wadsworth; and to proceed with the residue of the troops to Bladensburg, and take a position to support General Stansbury. This order was put in immediate execution, and the troops for Bladensburg moved off with all the expedition of which they were capable. Having put them in motion, I passed on ahead, in order that I might select my position against their arrival. I found General Stansbury posted on the west side of the Eastern Branch, his right resting on the main road, distant from the bridge at Bladensburg five or six hundred yards, and extending northeastwardly, his left approaching nearer to the creek. An extensive apple orchard was in his front, and, one hundred to two hundred yards in advance, a work thrown up, commanding the bridge, occupied by a corps of artillerists with five or six pieces, and appeared to be supported by some rifle and light companies. In his rear, on the right was a thick undergrowth of wood, and directly behind that a deep hollow, or ravine, open or cleared, of about sixty yards in width, which the main road crosses. The ravine terminates on the left in a bold acclivity, about two hundred yards from the road; the rest of the ground in his rear was open, unbroken, and gradually ascending fields. Having hastily examined the grounds, and concluded on the dispositions I should

extreme left of the front line; two pieces more of artillery were posted in the road near the bridge at Bladensburg; the residue of that regiment, about three hundred and fifty strong, under the command of Colonel Brent, was formed as a reserve a short distance in the rear of Major Peter's battery, and so disposed as to act on the right, or left, or in front, as occasion might require. Near them was posted, in the same manner, Major Waring's Prince George's battalion of militia, about one hundred and fifty. Colonel William D. Beall, with a regiment of troops from Annapolis, passed through Bladensburg as our troops arrived, and took a position on the right of the road and nearly fronting it, at a distance of about two hundred and fifty yards. Previous to the arrival of the troops on the ground, General Winder came up from the city, and, being made acquainted with the intended dispositions of the troops, as well as the ground reserved for Commodore Barney and the marines, approved of and confirmed them.

About half past twelve o'clock, and while the troops were yet taking their different positions, innumerable rockets, thrown from the heights at Bladensburg, announced the arrival of the enemy there; and at this period Commodore Barney's sailors and marines, in quick march, arrived and took possession of the ground previously assigned them, his artillery being posted in and near the road upon its right, commanding the road and open field in front; and his infantry, together with the marines under Captain Miller, extending to the right, thus occupying the interval of ground between Colonel Magruder's 1st regiment District militia and Colonel Beall's Maryland regiment. The firing of artillery in front soon commenced, and immediately after that of musketry, in quick and rapid succession. In a few minutes the whole right and centre of the front line, with some small exceptions, were seen retiring in disorder and confusion. The firing still continued on the extreme left, but shortly after it also broke, and, although it retired in more order, yet none could be rallied so as to renew the action with effect, and also soon entirely quitted the field.

Meanwhile the left of the enemy, in heavy column, passed along the road crossing the ravine. They were here encountered by the troops of Colonel Kramer, posted in the woods on the edge of the ravine. These, after a short conflict, were compelled to retire, which they did principally under cover of the adjacent woods, and formed with the troops of Colonel Beall on the right. The enemy's column now displayed in the field on the right of the road. They here became exposed to the oblique fire of Major Peter's battery, which was kept up with great animation. Still pressing on to the front of our right, they came in contact with the heavy artillery of Commodore Barney, and of the troops posted there. Here the firing became tremendous. They were repulsed, again returned to the charge, succeeded in forcing the troops on the right, and finally carried the position of Commodore Barney.

The dispersion of the front line caused a dangerous opening on our left, of which the enemy in that quarter promptly availed. He advanced rapidly; then, wheeling on his left, soon gained, and was turning our left flank. To oppose this alarming movement, I directed Colonel Brent, with the 2d regiment of District militia, to take a position still more to

the left; and he was proceeding in the execution of this order when orders came from General Winder for the whole of the troops to retreat. The efforts of the enemy had hitherto been directed principally against the right and left of our whole line of battle.

The troops of this District, and a part of those attached to them, occupying positions mostly in the centre, and some of them difficult of access, were consequently but partially engaged, and this principally with light troops and skirmishers, now pressing forward, supported by a column of infantry.

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The order to retreat was executed by regiments and corps, as they had been formed, and with as much order as the nature of the ground would permit. The first and second regiments halted and formed, after retreating five or six hundred paces, but were again ordered by General Winder to retire. At this moment I fell in with General Winder, and, after a short conference with him, was directed to move on and collect the troops, and prepare to make a stand on the heights westward of the turnpike gate. This was done as fast as the troops came up. A front was again presented toward the enemy, consisting principally of the troops of this district, a part of those who had been attached to them in the action, and a Virginia regiment of about four hundred men, under Colonel Minor, which met us at this place. While the line was yet forming, I received orders from General Winder to fall back to the Capitol, and there form for battle. I took the liberty of suggesting my impression of the preferable situation we then occupied; but, expecting that he might be joined there by some of the dispersed troops of the front line, he chose to make the stand there. Approaching the Capitol, I halted the troops, and requested his orders as to the formation of the line. We found no auxiliaries there. He then conferred for a few moments with General Armstrong, who was a short distance from us, and then gave orders that the whole should retreat through Washington and Georgetown. It is impossible to do justice to the anguish evinced by the troops of Washington and Georgetown on the receiving of this order. The idea of leaving their families, their houses, and their homes at the mercy of an enraged enemy was insupportable. To preserve that order which was maintained during the retreat was now no longer practicable. As they retired through Washington and Georgetown, numbers were obtaining and taking leave to visit their homes, and then again rejoining; and with ranks thus broken and scattered, they halted at night on the heights near Tenleytown, and on the ensuing assemble at Montgomery Court House.

The troops of Washington and Georgetown have been assailed, in the public prints and elsewhere, with calumnies as unmerited as they are cruel and wanton. They have heard of them with indignant astonishment. Conscious that in no instance have they been wanting in the duty they owed to their country or to themselves, but, on the contrary, in obedience to the call of their government, have with alacrity obeyed its orders, and intrepidly fronted an enemy vastly their superior

in force, and never yielded the ground to him but by orders emanating from superior authority, they can not restrain the feelings excited by such manifest, such unprovoked injustice. They have seen with satisfaction the resolution of Congress to inquire into this subject, and, persuaded of the justice and impartiality of your honorable committee, entertain a confident assurance that the result of your investigation will afford relief to their injured feelings. Connected with this subject, I beg leave to refer to a letter of General Winder, No. 3, in answer to an inquiry made of him as to the general conduct of the brigade while under his command.

I have the honor to be, etc.,

W. SMITH,

Brigadier-General 1st Columbia Brigade.

Honorable R. M. Johnson.

P. S.—I ought to have mentioned that parts of two companies of the United States 12th and 38th regiments were attached to the 36th regiment, under Lieutenant-Colonel Scott. Previous to the march to Bladensburg, eighty men of his command had been stationed near the Eastern Branch Bridge, and did not join until after the action. His force then was less than three hundred men. —W. S.

## REPORT OF COMMODORE BARNEY IN MILITARY AND NAVAL LETTERS.

About 2 o'clock General Winder came to my quarters, and we made some arrangements for the morning. In the morning I received a note from General Winder, and waited upon him; he requested me to take command, and place my artillery to defend the passage of the bridge on the Eastern Branch, as the enemy was approaching the city in that direction. I immediately put my guns into position, leaving the marines and the rest of my men at the barracks, to wait further orders. I was in this situation when I had the honour to meet you, with the President and heads of departments, when it was determined that I should draw off my guns and men, and proceed towards Bladensburg, which was immediately put into execution. On our way, I was informed that the enemy was within a mile of Bladensburg;—we hurried on. The day was hot, and my men very much crippled from the severe marches we had experienced the days before, many of them being without shoes, which I had replaced that morning. I preceded the men, and when I arrived at the *line* which separates the district from Maryland, the battle began. I sent an officer back to hurry on my men; they came up in a *trot*; we took our position on the rising ground, put the pieces in battery, posted the *marines* under Captain Miller, and the flotilla men, who were to act as infantry, under their own officers, on my right, to support the pieces, and waited the approach of the enemy. During this period the engage-

ment continued, and the enemy advancing, our own army retreating before them, apparently in much disorder. At length the enemy made his appearance on the main road, in force, and in front of my battery, and on seeing us made a halt. I reserved our fire. In a few minutes the enemy again advanced, when I ordered an 18 pounder to be fired, which completely cleared the road; shortly after, a second and a third attempt was made by the enemy to come forward, but all were destroyed. They then crossed over into an open field, and attempted to flank our right; he was there met by three 12 pounders, the marines under Captain Miller, and my men, acting as infantry, and was again totally cut up. By this time not a vestige of the American army remained, except a body five or six hundred, posted on a height on my right, from whom I expected much support, from their fine situation.

The enemy from this period never appeared in force in *front* of us; they pushed forward their *sharp* shooters; one of which shot my horse under me, who fell dead between two of my guns. The enemy, who had been kept in check by our fire for nearly half an hour, now began to outflank us on the right; our guns were turned that way; he pushed up the hill, about two or three hundred, towards the corps of Americans stationed as above described, who, to my great mortification, made no resistance, giving a fire or two and retired. In this situation we had the whole army of the enemy to contend with. Our ammunition was expended; and, unfortunately, the drivers of my ammunition wagons had gone off in the general panic. At this time I received a severe wound in my thigh; Captain Miller was wounded; sailing master Warner killed; acting sailing master Martin killed; and sailing master Martin wounded; but, to the honor of my officers and men, as fast as their companions and messmates fell at the guns, they were instantly replaced from the infantry.

Finding the enemy now completely in our rear, and no means of defense, I gave orders to my officers and men to retire.

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## REPORT OF ADMIRAL COCKBURN.

At day-light, on the morning of the 24th, the major-general again put the army in motion, directing his march upon Bladensburg; on reaching which place, with the advanced brigade, the enemy was observed drawn up in force on a rising ground beyond the town; and by the fire he soon opened on us as we entered the place, gave us to understand he was well protected by artillery. General Ross, however, did not hesitate in immediately advancing to attack him, although our troops were almost exhausted with the fatigue of the march they had just made, and but a small proportion of our little army had yet got up. This dashing measure was, however, I am happy to add, crowned with the success it merited; for, in spite of the galling fire of the enemy, our troops advanced steadily on both his flanks, and in his front; and, as soon as they arrived on even ground with him, he fled in every direction, leaving behind him 10 pieces

of cannon, and a considerable number of killed and wounded; amongst the latter Commodore Barney, and several other officers. Some other prisoners were also taken, though not many, owing to the swiftness with which the enemy went off, and the fatigue our army had previously undergone.

It would, sir, be deemed presumption in me to attempt to give you particular details respecting the nature of this battle; I shall, therefore, only remark generally, that the enemy, 8,000 strong, on ground he had chosen as best adapted for him to defend, where he had time to erect his batteries, and concert all his measures, was dislodged as soon as reached, and a victory gained over him by a division of the British army, not amounting to more than 1500 men, headed by our gallant general, whose brilliant achievements of this day it is beyond my power to do justice to, and indeed no possible comment could enhance.

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## REPORT OF MAJOR GENERAL ROSS.

TONNANT, IN THE PATUXENT,

AUGUST 30, 1814.

My Lord,

I have the honor to communicate to your lordship, that on the 24th instant, after defeating the army of the United States on that day, the troops under my command entered and took possession of the city of Washington.

It was determined between Sir Alexander Cochrane and myself, to disembark the army at the village of Benedict, on the right bank of the Patuxent, with the intention of cooperating with Rear-Admiral Cockburn, in an attack upon a flotilla of the enemy's gun-boats, under the command of Commodore Barney. On the 20th instant, the army commenced its march, having landed the previous day without opposition; on the 21st it reached Nottingham, and on the 22d moved on to Upper Marlborough, a few miles distant from Pig Point, on the Patuxent, where Admiral Cockburn fell in with and defeated the flotilla, taking and destroying the whole. Having advanced within 16 miles of Washington, and ascertained the force of the enemy to be such as might authorize an attempt at carrying his capitol, I determined to make it, and accordingly put the troops in movement on the evening of the 23rd. A corps of about 1200 men appeared to oppose us, but retired after firing a few shots. On the 24th the troops resumed their march and reached Bladensburg, a village situate on the left bank of the eastern branch of the Potomac, about five miles from Washington.

On the opposite side of that river the enemy was discovered strongly posted on very commanding heights, formed in two lines, his advance occupying a fortified house which, with artillery, covered the bridge over the eastern branch, which the British had to pass. A broad and

straight road leading from the bridge to Washington, ran through the enemy's position, which was carefully defended by artillery and riflemen.

The disposition for the attack being made, it was commenced with so much impetuosity by the light brigade, consisting of the 85th light infantry and the light infantry companies of the army under the command of Colonel Thornton, that the fortified house was shortly carried, the enemy retiring to the higher grounds.

In support of the light brigade, I ordered up a brigade under the command of Colonel Brooke, who, with the 44th regiment, attacked the enemy's left, the 4th regiment pressing his right with such effect as to cause him to abandon his guns. His first line giving way, was driven on the second, which, yielding to the irresistable attack of the bayonet, and the well-directed discharge of rockets, got into confusion and fled, leaving the British masters of the field. The rapid flight of the enemy, and his knowledge of the country, precluded the possibility of many prisoners being taken, more particularly as the troops had, during the day, undergone considerable fatigue.

The enemy's army, amounting to 8000 or 9000 men, with 300 or 400 cavalry, was under the command of General Winder, being formed of troops drawn from Baltimore and Pennsylvania. His artillery, ten pieces of which fell into our hands, was commanded by Commodore Barney, who was wounded and taken prisoner. The artillery I directed to be destroyed.

Having halted the army for a short time, I determined to march upon Washington, and reached that city at 8 o'clock that night. Judging it of consequence to complete the destruction of the public buildings with the least possible delay, so that the army might retire without loss of time, the following buildings were set fire to and consumed—the capitol, including the Senate-house and House of Representatives; the Arsenal, the Dock-yard, Treasury, War Office, President's Palace, Ropewalk and the great bridge across the Potomac; in the Dock-yard a frigate nearly ready to be launched, and a sloop of war, were consumed. The two bridges leading to Washington over the eastern branch had been destroyed by the enemy, who apprehended an attack from that quarter. The object of the expedition being accomplished, I determined, before any greater force of the enemy could be assembled, to withdraw the troops, and accordingly commenced retiring on the night of the 25th. On the evening of the 29th we reached Benedict, and re-embarked the following day. In the performance of the operation I have detailed it is with the utmost satisfaction I observe to your lordship that cheerfulness in undergoing fatigue, the anxiety for the accomplishment of the object, were conspicuous in all ranks.

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## LETTER OF A BRITISH OFFICER IN MILITARY OCCURRENCES.

* * * on turning a sudden angle in the road, and passing a small plantation, which obstructed the vision towards the left, the British and American armies became visible to one another. The position occupied

by the latter was one of great strength and commanding attitude. They were drawn up in three lines upon the brow of a hill, having their front and left flank covered by a branch of the Potomac, and their right resting upon a thick wood and a deep ravine. This river, which may be about the breadth of the Isis at Oxford, flowed between the heights occupied by the American forces and the little town of Bladensburg. Across it was thrown a narrow bridge, extending from the chief street in that town to the continuation of the road, which passed through the very center of their position; and its right bank (the bank above which they were drawn up) was covered with a narrow strip of willows and larch trees, whilst the left was altogether bare, low and exposed. Such was the general aspect of their position as at the first glance it presented itself; of which I must endeavor to give a more detailed account, that my description of the battle may be in some degree intelligible.

I have said that the right bank of the Potomac was covered with a narrow strip of willow and larch trees. Here the Americans had stationed strong bodies of riflemen, who, in skirmishing order, covered the whole front of their army. Behind this narrow plantation, again, the fields were open and clear, intersected, at certain distances, by rows of high and strong palings. About the middle of the ascent, and in the rear of these rows, stood the first line, composed entirely of infantry; at a proper interval from this, and in a similar situation, stood the second line; while the third, or reserve, was posted within the skirts of a wood, which crowned the heights. The artillery, again, of which they had twenty pieces in the field, was thus arranged: On the high road, and commanding the bridge, stood two heavy guns; and four more, two on each side of the road, swept partly in the same direction, and partly down the whole of the slope into the streets of Bladensburg. The rest were scattered, with no great judgment, along the second line of infantry, occupying different spaces between the right of one regiment and the left of another; while the cavalry showed itself in one mass, within a stubble field, near the extreme left of the position. Such was the nature of the ground which they occupied, and the formidable posture in which they waited our approach; amounting, by their own account, to 9000 men, a number exactly doubling that of the force which was to attack them.

In the meantime, our column continued to advance in the same order which it had hitherto preserved. The road conducted us for about two miles in a direction parallel with the river, and of consequence with the enemy's line; when it suddenly turned, and led directly towards the town of Bladensburg. Being, of course, ignorant whether this town might not be filled with American troops, the main body paused here, till the advance guard should reconnoitre. The result proved that no opposition was intended in that quarter, and that the whole of the enemy's army had been withdrawn to the opposite side of the stream, whereupon the army was again put in motion, and in a short time arrived in the streets of Bladensburg, and within range of the American artillery. Immediately on our reaching this point, several of their guns opened upon us, and kept up a quick and well directed cannonade, from which, as we were again commanded to halt, the men were directed to shelter themselves as

much as possible behind the houses. The object of this halt, it was conjectured, was to give the General an opportunity of examining the American line, and of trying the depth of the river; because at present there appeared to be but one practicable mode of attack, by crossing the bridge, and taking the enemy directly in front. To do so, however, exposed as the bridge was, must be attended with bloody consequence, nor could the delay of a few minutes produce any mischief which the discovery of a ford would not amply compensate.

But in this conjecture we were altogether mistaken; for without allowing time to the column to close its ranks or to be formed by some of the many stragglers, who were now hurrying, as fast as weariness would permit, to regain their places, the order to halt was countermanded, and the word given to attack, and we immediately pushed on at double quick time, towards the head of the bridge. While we were moving along the street, a continued fire was kept up, with some execution, from those guns which stood to the left of the road; but it was not till the bridge was covered with our people that the two-gun battery upon the road itself began to play. Then, indeed, it also opened, and with tremendous effect, for at the first discharge almost an entire company was swept down: but whether it was that the guns had been previously laid with measured exactness, or that the nerves of the gunners became afterwards unsteady, the succeeding discharges were much less fatal. The riflemen likewise now galled us from the wooded bank with a running fire of musketry, and it was not without trampling upon many of their dead and dying comrades that the light brigade established itself on the opposite side of the stream.

When once there, however, everything else appeared easy. Wheeling off to the right and left of the road, they dashed into the thicket and quickly cleared it of the American skirmishers, who, falling back with precipitation upon the first line, threw it into disorder before it had fired a shot. The consequence was that our troops had scarcely shown themselves when the whole of that line gave way and fled in the greatest confusion, leaving the two guns upon the road in possession of the victors.

But here it must be confessed that the light brigade was guilty of imprudence. Instead of pausing till the rest of the army came up, they lightened themselves by throwing away their knapsacks and haversacks, and, extending their rank so as to show an equal front with the enemy, pushed on to the attack of the second line. The Americans, however, saw their weakness and stood firm, and, having the whole of their artillery, with the exception of those captured on the road, and the greater part of their infantry in this line, they first checked the ardour of the assailants by a heavy fire, and then in their turn, advanced to recover the ground which was lost. Against this charge the extended order of the British troops would not permit them to offer an effectual resistance, and they were accordingly borne back to the very thicket upon the river's brink, where they maintained themselves with determined obstinacy, repelling all attempts to drive them through it, and frequently following, to within a short distance of the cannon's mouth, such parts of the enemy's line as gave way.

In this state the action continued till the second brigade had likewise

crossed and formed upon the right bank of the river, when the 44th Regiment moving to the right and driving in the skirmishers, debouched upon the left flank of the Americans, and completely turned it. In that quarter, therefore, the battle was won, because the raw militia-men, who were stationed there as being the least assailable point, when once broken could not be rallied. But on their right, the enemy still kept their ground with much resolution; nor was it until the arrival of the 4th Regiment and the advance of the British forces in firm array to the charge, that they began to waver. Then, indeed, seeing their left in full flight, and the 44th getting in their rear, they lost all order and dispersed, leaving clouds of riflemen to cover their retreat, and hastened to conceal themselves in the woods, where it would have been vain to follow them. The rout was now general throughout the whole line. The reserve, which ought to have supported the main body, fled as soon as those in its front began to give away; and the cavalry, instead of charging the British troops, now scattered in pursuit, turned their horses' heads and galloped off, leaving them in undisputed possession of the field, and of ten out of the twenty pieces of artillery.

This battle, by which the fate of the American capitol was decided, began about one o'clock in the afternoon and lasted till four. The loss on the part of the English was severe, since, out of the two-thirds of the army, which were engaged, upwards of five hundred men were killed and wounded; and what rendered it doubly severe was, that among these were numbered several officers of rank and distinction.....On the side of the Americans the slaughter was not so great. Being in possession of a strong position, they were of course less exposed in defending, than the others in storming it; and had they conducted themselves with coolness, and resolution, it is not conceivable how the day could have been won. But the fact is, that with the exception of a party of sailors from the gun boats, under the command of Commodore Barney, no troops could behave worse than they did. The skirmishers were driven in as soon as attacked, the first line gave way without offering the slightest resistance, and the left of the main body was broken within half an hour after it was seriously engaged. Of the sailors, however, it would be injustice not to speak in the terms which their conduct merits. They were employed as gunners, and not only did they serve their guns with a quickness and precision which astonished their assailants, but they stood until some of them were actually bayoneted, with fusees in their hands; nor was it till their leader was wounded and taken, and they saw themselves deserted on all sides by the soldiers, that they quitted the field. With respect to the British army, again, no line of distinction can be drawn. All did their duty, and none more gallantly than the rest; and though the brunt of the affair fell on the light brigade, this was owing chiefly to the circumstances of its being at the head of the column, and perhaps, also, in some degree, to its own rash impetuousity. The artillery, indeed, could do little; being unable to show itself in presence of a force so superior; but the six-pounder was nevertheless brought into action, and a corps of rockets proved of striking utility.

Our troops being worn down from fatigue, and of course as ignorant

of the country, as the Americans were the reverse, the pursuit could not be continued to any distance. Neither was it attended with much slaughter. Diving into the recesses of the forests, and covering themselves with riflemen, the enemy were quickly beyond our reach; and having no cavalry to scour even the high road, ten of the lightest of their guns were carried off in the flight. The defeat, however, was absolute, and the army, which had been collected for the defence of Washington was scattered beyond the possibility of, at least, an immediate reunion; and as the distance from Bladensburg to that city does not exceed four miles, there appeared to be no further obstacle in the way, to prevent its immediate capture.

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